

Conference Abstract

Overcoming the Tyranny of Distance: Revealing Type Collections Down-Under.

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Abstract

Auckland Museum's Natural Science collections contain several thousands of biological primary types, some dating back to well over a 100 years.

Biological type specimens are important for the recognition of new species, because they are the specimens on which species names and descriptions are based, and so they are the standards against which all potentially new species are measured. As by definition there can only ever be one primary type for each species, these are the unique specimens with highest scientific value.

Fun fact one: More than almost any other country, New Zealand has a very high percentage of endemic fauna and flora, which means species that are found nowhere else.

Fun fact two: In New Zealand we only know about 50% of our biodiversity, which means half of all our species are yet to be discovered and described.

Therefore, our type collections are actively growing as more and more species are discovered and more and more type specimens are lodged in our collections. Because they are unique, types are of great interest to researchers. However, because of our remote position on the globe many researchers request loans of our type specimens rather than travel the long distance to Auckland. Although such practices were common in the past, we, like many other modern natural history institutions no longer allow the loan of many of these unique items. The risk of damage or loss en route to the recipient and back is

considered too great. However, it is a disservice to science not to make types available for study.

So in 2008 we launched a project to digitise our type collections. This talk will focus on how high resolution images of our primary types, and their online publication, has removed much of the need for loans and thereby lessened the risks to these important specimens. At the same time it has made our type collections more visible and accessible to a much greater audience.

Keywords

Type Collections, Auckland Museum, marine, fossil, high resolution imaging, loans

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